

Message Text

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12
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SUBJECT: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIAL VIEWS THE WEST
BANK AND ITS RECENT DISTURBANCES

REF: JERUSALEM 962, JERUSALEM 1055, JERUSALEM 1089,
TEL AVIV 3689.

1. DAVID ARIEL, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS'
LIAISON OFFICER FOR THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, ON
AUGUST 17 REVIEWED FOR AN EMBASSY OFFICER SOME OF
THE IMPLICATIONS OF WEST BANK ANTI-VAT DISTURBANCES
AND REACTIONS TO CURRENT EVENTS IN LEBANON. ARIEL
SAID THAT THE ARABS IN THE TERRITORIES WERE MOSTLY
CONFUSED ABOUT LEBANON, AND THAT WHILE THEY VOICED
PRO-PALESTINIAN STATEMENTS, THERE WAS A "DEAFENING
SILENCE" REGARDING ACTUAL DEMANDS FOR SYRIAN TROOPS
TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON. ARIEL DEPRECIATED
WEST BANKERS' LEBANESE RELIEF EFFORTS (JERUSALEM 962),
DESCRIBING THEM AS "VERY POOR." HE SAID THIS WAS
BECAUSE ARABS HAVE NO TRADITION OF HELPING PEOPLE IN
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NEED, AND BECAUSE THE WEST BANKERS HAVE RELATIVELY

FEWER CLOSE RELATIVES IN LEBANON THAN IN JORDAN. AT THE TIME OF THE FINAL RELIEF SHIPMENT ON AUGUST 11, ARIEL SAID, THE UNITY BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE WEST BANK RELIEF COMMITTEE WAS BEGINNING TO CRACK ALONG SECTARIAN (MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN) LINES BECAUSE OF DIFFERENCES OVER DISTRIBUTION OF THE RELIEF SUPPLIES.

2. ON THIS ISSUE OF SECTARIAN DIVISION, ARIEL SAID THAT THE ISRAELI AUTHORITIES WERE NOT WORRIED THAT WEST BANK SECTARIAN STRIFE WOULD DEVELOP, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS SOME "SPILLOVER" ANTAGONISM FROM LEBANON INTO THE TERRITORIES. AS AN EXAMPLE, HE CITED THE INDIGNATION EXPRESSED BY NABLUS ARABS WHEN A RECENT AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE STORY REPORTED INCREASED MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN TENSIONS IN NABLUS. THE STORY WAS UNFOUNDED, ARIEL SAID, BUT BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MOSLEMS SHOWED MARKED SENSITIVITIES OVER ITS APPEARANCE. (ARIEL ESTIMATED ROUGHLY THAT CHRISTIANS MIGHT COMPRISE FIVE PERCENT OF THE TOTAL ARAB POPULATION IN THE TERRITORIES.)

3. TURNING TO THE VAT-RELATED SHOP STRIKES AND SPORADIC VIOLENCE ON THE WEST BANK (JERUSALEM 1055 AND PREVIOUS), ARIEL SAID THAT CONTINUING VIOLENCE COULD NOT BE RULED OUT. IF THE OCCASION FOR SUCH VIOLENCE WERE NOT VAT (WHICH WAS "GOD-GIVEN," AS FAR AS ARAB AGITATORS WERE CONCERNED, IN THE MIDST OF THE DIVISIVENESS RAISED BY EVENTS IN LEBANON), IT COULD JUST AS WELL BE SOME ANNIVERSARY OR SOME UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION OR EVEN THE OPENING OF SCHOOL. ARIEL NOTED THAT TODAY'S ARAB TEENAGERS HAVE GROWN UP UNDER OCCUPATION AND THAT THIS FACT, IN COMBINATION WITH THE PRESSURES OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM, MADE FOR AT LEAST A GOOD POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER VIOLENCE IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES.

4. ARIEL SAID THAT THE ARABS WILL BE THE ONES TO LOSE BY NOT GOING ALONG. (ARAB MERCHANTS SHE SAID, MUST PAY VAT ON GOODS PURCHASED IN OR IMPORTED THROUGH ISRAEL AND WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RECOVER TAXES LEVIED AT EARLIER STAGES WITHOUT PROPER BOOKKEEPING. MOREOVER, CERTAIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BUSINESS INTERESTS ACTUALLY STOOD TO GAIN FROM THE NEW SYSTEM, WHICH REDUCES SOME PURCHASES TAXES AT THE SAME TIME THAT VAT GOES INTO EFFECT.) HE REFERRED ONLY BRIEFLY TO THE "VAT COMPROMISE" ANNOUNCED BY PERES ON AUGUST 13 (JERUSALEM 1089), WHEREBY ONLY MERCHANTS WITH ANNUAL TURNOVER EXCEEDING HALF A MILLION ISRAELI POUNDS WILL BE REQUIRED TO KEEP BOOKS. THE ARABS PRIVATELY FOUND THIS COMPROMISE QUITE HEARTENING, ARIEL

SAID, BUT THEIR PUBLIC STANCE CONTINUED TO BE ONE OF
NON-COMPLIANCE.

5. ASKED ABOUT THE NEW WEST BANK LEADERSHIP, ARIEL
SAID THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT
AND THE NEW WEST BANK LEADERS--WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS--
WERE PROCEEDING ON A PRACTICAL BASIS, DESPITE IDEO-
LOGICAL DIFFERENCES. THE WEST BANK LEADERS WERE ALSO
MAINTAINING TRADITIONAL TIES WITH KING HUSSEIN'S
GOVERNMENT IN JORDAN, ARIEL SAID, AND HE DESCRIBED
WITH SOME AMUSEMENT HOW THE WEST BANKERS PAY THEIR
RESPECTS IN AMMAN, DRESSED IN THEIR BEST SUITS, STANDING
IN LINE, WAITING FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACKNOWLEDGE
"THE BOSS." THIS WAS NOT AT ALL SURPRISING, SAID
ARIEL, AND ISRAEL AND JORDAN UNDERSTAND THAT ONE DAY
THE TWO OF THEM TOGETHER WOULD WORK OUT THE FUTURE
FOR THESE (PALESTINIAN) PEOPLE.

6. COMMENT: THE ISRAELIS SEEM TO HAVE LEARNED FROM THE
WIDE-SPREAD WEST BANK DISTURBANCES LAST SPRING
THAT FORCE SUFFICIENT TO REPRESS DISTURBANCES MAY
COST TOO MUCH IN ADVERSE PUBLICITY (TEL AVIV 3689).
FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON AND MFA DEPUTY DIRECTOR EVRON
RECENTLY DESCRIBED TO THE AMBASSADOR AN ISRAELI
"HANDS OFF" POLICY FOR THE WEST BANK: THE IDF WILL
NO LONGER ATTEMPT TO FORCE ARABS TO MAINTAIN
"NORMALITY," TO OPEN THEIR SHOPS, OR TO KEEP THEIR
SCHOOLS IN OPERATION. ISRAELI POLICY WILL BE SIMPLY
TO ENFORCE CURFEWS WHEN NECESSARY IN ORDER TO
PREVENT CROWD EMOTIONS FROM BOILING OVER. THIS "HANDS
OFF" POLICY CAN ALSO BE SEEN IN RECENT PUBLIC STATE-
MENTS BY DEFENSE MINISTER PERES, WHO HAS SAID THAT THE
AUTHORITIES SHOULD NOT INTERVENE IN THE VAT-RELATED
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STRIKES BY ARABS BECAUSE THE STRIKE IS AGAINST AN
ECONOMIC RATHER THAN POLITICAL BACKGROUND.
TOON

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